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Strawberry Bush, Bursting Heart *Euonymus americanus* L.

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Technical Report

Wetland Flora



No. 99-9 / September 1999

Gene Silberhorn

Strawberry Bush

Bursting Heart

Euonymus americanus L.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Strawberry bush is one of those unique plants that has a much more elaborate and colorful fruit that contrasts with its rather drab, greenish-yellow flowers. The warty, red, pendulous 5 parted capsules split open to reveal brilliant orange to red/orange seeds that remain attached to the pod as illustrated. The erect shrub stands 3 to 6 feet tall and has opposite, simple leaves with toothed or serrated margins. Twigs and branches are bright green, making it easy to recognize in winter after the fruits and leaves have fallen. The small, ½ inch, flowers appear in late April and continue until late May. The enclosed capsule is green throughout most of the growing season, but turns colorful after it dehisces in late September to October in coastal Virginia. *Euonymus americanus* is closely related to bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), a climbing vine, more common in the mountains than along the coast, which also has an equally colorful capsule that is often collected for decoration.

Distribution

Euonymus americanus is found throughout much of the eastern United States.

Habitat

Strawberry bush is often found along the margins of swamps, shaded streambanks, sloped wetlands, seepage areas or upland woods. It may be associated with other shrubs such as spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) Wetland Flora No.94-5, July, 1994; arrow wood (*Viburnum dentatum*) or sweet pepper bush (*Clethra alnifolia*). *Euonymus americanus* is not a flood tolerant species, but can grow in saturated or unsaturated soils and is adapted to shaded conditions.

Ecological Value/Benefits

Although this shrub (leaves and branches) is considered to be poisonous to cattle, the leaves are often devoured by insects.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Draft Revision of the National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Euonymus americana* is classified as a **facultative plant (FAC)**. FAC plants are "equally likely to occur in wetlands or non-wetlands (estimated probability 34%-66%)."

Euonymus americanus L.



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